

# CCD BULLETIN

## FOCUS: CONSERVATION SITE DESIGN

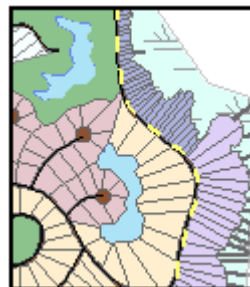
Although the cornerstone of “Smart Growth” is increasing density in existing *urban* centers so as to reduce growth pressures on outlying areas, an ongoing need remains to accommodate planned developments in rural and suburban communities. Ideally a region’s land use plan will already have protected valuable natural resources such as wetlands, riparian zones and sizable forest tracts, by officially designating these areas as perpetual open space. But even if “green infrastructure” has already been established – and particularly if it has not – there are environmental advantages to designing new developments with an eye to clustering impacts and conserving ecological resources.

Conventional site design typically begins by dividing available land into lots of equal sizes. The reverse is true for conservation design, where lot division is the last step in the design process. Instead, open space on the parcel is first set aside based on resource value and connectivity to other natural areas. Next, housing sites are selected and roads aligned, all before final lot lines are drawn. Typically, open space is protected by a conservation easement, with common ownership by residents. This approach not only preserves valuable environmental features and rural character, but also creates more walkable neighborhoods with reduced infrastructure costs.

Conservation Design



Conventional Design



[From NOAA Coastal Services Center’s Alternative for Coastal Development site, [www.csc.noaa.gov/alternatives](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/alternatives)]

Although market research has consistently demonstrated the appeal of conservation subdivisions, developers are often deterred by requirements for zoning variances and special permits for higher housing density and smaller lot sizes. Adoption of a conservation subdivision ordinance, which provides design flexibility when open space is preserved, can help to promote conservation design. Special incentives, such as streamlining of the review process for conservation designs, can also encourage conservation-oriented development. [For a model conservation subdivision ordinance, see the Atlanta Regional Commission’s *Conservation Subdivisions* toolkit:

[www.atlantaregional.com/qualitygrowth/planning/Toolkits/conservation\\_subdivision\\_tool.pdf](http://www.atlantaregional.com/qualitygrowth/planning/Toolkits/conservation_subdivision_tool.pdf).]

It is important to keep in mind that even the most sensitively designed conservation subdivision can run counter to the goals of Smart Growth, if it is built in an area lacking public transportation options and/or at a great distance from existing growth centers. Conservation design should be considered as a part of a comprehensive plan for better development in a region, not as a stand-alone strategy.



## RECOMMENDED READING

***Smart Growth at the Frontier: Strategies and Resources for Rural Communities***  
by Barbara Wells, Northeast-Midwest Institute

The need for rural smart growth strategies is clear: rural towns are at the very frontier of tomorrow's sprawling development. This document uses examples from throughout the country to illustrate rural growth strategies that revitalize small towns, link natural resource protection with resort and residential development, maintain working landscapes, and coordinate regional development. To download, go to [www.nemw.org/RuralSmartGrowth.pdf](http://www.nemw.org/RuralSmartGrowth.pdf).



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## COMMUNITY TOOL SHED

***Conservation Design Portfolio: Preserving Minnesota Landscapes through Creative Development***

[www.mnland.org/programs-consplanning.html](http://www.mnland.org/programs-consplanning.html)

This guidebook from the Minnesota Land Trust includes general information on the concepts of open space planning and conservation site design, as well as a detailed discussion of the design process for rural "working landscapes" and suburban subdivisions. The portfolio also provides details on seven case studies from Minnesota, with sketches of the final plans.

***Alternatives for Coastal Development Web site***  
from NOAA's Coastal Services Center

[www.csc.noaa.gov/alternatives](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/alternatives)

To illustrate the costs and benefits of various types of development, this project created three alternative scenarios for a residential area in coastal Georgia. Economic, environmental, and social indicators were estimated and compared for the conventional, conservation, and "new urbanist" designs, demonstrating the increased net revenue benefits expected for conservation and new urbanist approaches as compared to conventional development. The Web site includes site plans for each alternative, as well as a 3-D visualization tool. Information is also provided on the design process and accessing technical resources.

***Conservation Subdivisions*** fact sheet from NEMO and the Natural Lands Trust  
[http://web.uconn.edu/nemo/publications/fact\\_sheets/nemo\\_fact\\_sheet\\_9\\_s.pdf](http://web.uconn.edu/nemo/publications/fact_sheets/nemo_fact_sheet_9_s.pdf)

*The CCD Bulletin is edited and distributed by the National Sea Grant Office. But for the most meaningful content, we're relying on you. We're especially interested in sharing your stories of successful (or less than successful) coastal community development projects. Please send your suggestions, submissions and insights to:*  
[Amy.Zimmerling@noaa.gov](mailto:Amy.Zimmerling@noaa.gov).